

FRENCH WOMEN MEETING POST WAR TASKS BRAVELY

Peasant and Middle Class Types Show Sterling Qualities Inbred for Decades and Handle Problems of Reconstruction With Undaunted Spirit, Though Outlook Seemed Almost Hopeless---Highly Educated and Wealthy Doing Their Utmost, Too, Politics and the Hope for the Franchise Being Forgotten in the Needs of the Moment

NATURALLY the greatest interest attaches to the women of France in post war conditions, for France was the battlefield and her daughters found their most gigantic efforts were needed in the toil of reconstruction. In the series of articles on women of war worn Europe, written by Mrs. Borden Harriman for The New York Herald, the author has reached her climax in these heroic Frenchwomen who exhibit, she says, the great qualities of their ancestors in a period equally troubled, that about 1789.

Without bothering with politics nor striving for equality in franchise, though she enjoys the one and is keen about the other, the Frenchwoman of to-day is the same eminently practical person she has always been and her aid in restoring fields and villages to their former state has gone forward with efficiency and success.

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THE morale of France to-day is very high. Paris promises to be once more the city of glad faces of which the poet sang in pre-war times. There was a period when visitors were wont to think that the French were a superficial nation, bent on pleasure and not capable of much depth of feeling. This was probably because the visitors themselves, and especially Americans, came here seeking only the light side of life.

After the battle of the Marne, however, this estimation was changed. People said that they could never again doubt the seriousness and intensity of the French character. That the French once more laugh and are gay should lead no one into a reversal of their wartime judgment. There are those who can cover much with a patina of frivolity.

In studying the women of the countries of Europe, those of France are a great contrast to all others. Nearly everywhere else the war did one good thing in emancipating the women and educating them to their political responsibilities. Here the women seem to have unprotestingly returned to their pre-war condition. Only a small group is interested in the suffrage question, and there is no real fight being made to secure the vote.

When asked his opinion of woman suffrage in 1919, Clemenceau said that he was in favor of it for every country but France. He explained that here the peasant women would be voted like sheep by the priests. Therefore, until the women were free of clerical domination he could not approve extending the suffrage to them.

On the other hand, a clever French woman, in controversy of this idea, quoted Paul Hervieu to the effect that if such were the case, the priests would have long ago been leaders in the feminist movement, whereas, on the contrary, they are its strongest opponents.

Peasant Woman Unchanged From Pre-Revolutionary Time

To-day the middle aged peasant women are still the peasant women of 1789. They have the same lack of education and initiative, the same willingness to slave for their masters. But a change has come over the spirit of the dreams of the men. They have suddenly awakened to the fact that the town cannot live without the country, though the country does not need the town for its existence.

The peasant is in the peculiar position of being completely independent of every other class. The railroads and other utilities might cease to function and still he would continue to exist as usual. Therefore, one result of the war has been a growing antagonism between the town and the country. The peasant has made the gesture of going on strike against the towns.

The people of this class having suffered terribly in the war are now realizing their power. The war weighed so heavily upon them because of it being possible for their places to be filled by old men and children. They never had to be called back from the front as industrial workers were. When the armistice came few peasants were willing to return permanently to their farm work except those who had large families, whereas 60 per cent. of the factory workers went back to their old jobs.

Beginning of Cooperation Noted Among Farmers

The complaint is made on all sides now that it is most difficult to get help on the land. The young men and women are going into factories and so causing a great shortage of labor in rural districts. In the old days the whole family remained on the farm, while now the sons and daughters come into town, leaving the old people to work alone.

All this notwithstanding the fact that the farming classes are much the richest, and although the capitalist and industrial classes are heavily taxed, the farmers pay almost nothing.

There is a weak indication of the growth of unionism among the peasants, but there

seems little real understanding of such cooperation as exists among other workers who are unionized.

An encouraging instance is that in the north of France there is a cooperative society of about 300 farmers. They make butter in accordance with the Pasteur system on a very large scale. Ten thousand quarts of milk are produced daily, and 1,100 pounds of butter are made, all of which is shipped to the large cities.

The same group of farmers has enlarged its capital, and has built factories for the preparation of linen for the spinning mills; this process was formerly carried on in the homes, and was one of great drudgery, thereby threatening to decrease the growing of flax. With that difficulty removed, and the mills being rapidly reconstructed, the linen industry will now become greater than before the war.

The French woman, as a general rule, in her activities is essentially what is understood by the word feminine. Among Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic women there is far more invasion into the affairs of life that lie outside of the circle of the home.

However, there is a great amount of welfare work carried on by French women in an inconspicuous way. A large proportion of the hospitals, and many schools and relief organizations are run by women, who devote much of their lives to the work and of whom one never hears.

Does Not Seek Limelight, But Works With Originality

The French woman does not seek the limelight. Her energies are large, but they do not bring her individually into a prominence from which the customs and traditions of her race would tend to exclude her.

The training of a French girl, and the ideas with which she is imbued from childhood, are essentially those of a civilization which has always regarded the seclusion of the individual woman as a fundamental necessity. She shares equally with the men of her race that gift of original conception which is one of the powers of French thought.

That the world turns to France as the arbiter of taste is due primarily to the French woman. That the whole world flocks to Paris to buy its clothes is a spontaneous tribute to her that needs no comment. She has a native sense of proportion and color and a gift for combination that is the despair of women of other nations. This is cultivated in the schools, where the study of design is made a very important course, and where prizes are given for originality in designing such everyday things as hats and shoes, tables and chairs.

In her home life, in which after all women must prove and forge the national character, the French woman is essentially a devoted and affectionate mother and wife, and nowhere in the world is there more community of interest in financial matters between husband and wife than there is in France.

In a nation so given to small individual enterprise, and where commercial combination is relatively so little known, the sharing of business responsibilities between husband and wife is very general. Where Monsieur has a shop, one generally finds Madame. In addition to her family duties, in her place behind the cash register,

keeping a sharp eye on the details of trade.

In rural life she does an immense amount of heavy work, and in the fields she labors shoulder to shoulder with the man. In political matters the bulk of French women have a rather detached viewpoint. With their intense patriotism and family feeling, they take a vivid interest in anything that affects their beloved country or their families, but they display little energy or interest in the political activities of women as a separate organization.

Radical in Politics When They Take Interest

And in cases where they do break away from woman's established sphere and become active politically they take, as a rule, a very radical stand. An American woman married for many years to a Frenchman has said that in America one can be the mother of a family, a member of the golf club and a political leader all at the same time—but that in France one must take one's choice of the various destinies and eliminate the others.

But things even as deeply rooted in national life as the conservatism of French women have been shaken loose by the war, and in many directions since 1914 the women have ventured into new fields and evinced new interest in old ones. In modern welfare work there has been a great accession of energy. Many women have taken up with enthusiasm the ideas of social service demonstrated by the great welfare organizations during the war, and are striving to spread their influence among the French people. These progressive women are keen to know the latest developments in social work.

Curious Islands All Over the World

AT Yamagata, Japan, there is a small lake called the Lake of the Floating Islands, which is said to contain as many as sixty islands that change their position constantly. The islands, which move first one way and then the other, start from masses of vegetable debris that are carried to the surface by bubbles of gas; reeds soon grow on these masses in such quantity that they sometimes become top-heavy and overturn. In that case the reeds grow on the newly exposed side, until the islands have become so deep and wide that they will no longer turn over. Prof. Kusakabe of the Tohoku Imperial University and several associates have investigated the mysterious movements of these floating islands. By placing wooden floats in the lake to show the situation and direction of the various currents these gentlemen found that the combined action of currents of air and water is what makes the islands move.

About ten years ago a new island was reported in that curious Bogoslof Group among the Aleutians off the western extremity of Alaska. This one suddenly rose through seventy fathoms of water and far above, and its rise was accompanied by an earthquake that shook Unalaska and Dutch Harbor.

One of the most remarkable events in the history of this mysterious cluster occurred in 1907. On July 4 of that year officers of the revenue cutter McCulloch made a survey of a mountain, then smoking and fuming

How the French women are carrying on in reconstruction times: A relief station in northern France where children are fed and clothed. In the oval is the Princess de Polignac, who is doing much to advance women's interests in France.



This picture of French peasant women in the field is reminiscent of Millais's famous painting. At right is a characteristic peasant, cheerful despite the war's devastation.

Mme. Maurice de Wendel, wife of the great steel manufacturer, whose husband is in America studying manufacturing systems, is accompanying him to study our welfare work among women and children. Many women of the land owning class have initiated progressive methods of social service in the country towns near their estates.

Countess de Viel Castel, whose chateau is in the department of the Eure, has inaugurated in her vicinity a very active welfare organization comprising a system of visiting nurses and cookery classes and sewing classes for girls.

The Princess de Paix has a hospital for orphans left tubercular by the hardships of the war and the Princess de Polignac and the Marquise de Noailles have each initiated welfare work on a large scale.

Work of Reconstruction A Great Human Drama

In the north of France is the great human drama of the Reconstruction. It is there that the deep love of country that glorified France during the cataclysm of the war is continuing to manifest itself. The fundamental attribute of the nation, the love of the French peasant for the patch of land on which he was born and where he worked out his destiny, is there



turning to reconstruction the energies lately so potent in defence.

Besides the material side of this question the clearing of fields and rebuilding of houses, villages and towns, there is a spiritual reconstruction in which the very soul of the nation is made manifest. Even where the people are still living in mere makeshift homes, in dugouts and shacks of corrugated iron, they have reconstituted all the old customs and habits of happier times before the great desolation.

Where the old things around which customs centred have been destroyed, they have attempted substitutes, determined to

revive the thoughts and feelings of the old life—even though its outward symbols are yet to be rebuilt.

This drama of reconstruction is an illustration on an immense scale of that element that makes of France a stable nation. Her varied political history and the emotions and volatile nature of her people had caused France, before 1914, to be considered as somewhat undependable among the nations, this vindication during the war of her glorious stability being explained day by day by these French peasants, who with little besides love in their hearts, and the strength of their hands, face an incredible destruction which they, with the sympathy of the whole world, are going to build again into the semblance of their beloved France.

The reconstruction accomplished in northern France is quite extraordinary, and the French are generous in voicing their appreciation of the part played by Americans in this great work. One woman expresses the opinion that the American women have done much to stabilize the morale of France. She said she thought their example of unselfish work had cut very deep, and would be even more recognized in the future. She quoted Renan to illustrate her point:

"La memoire des hommes est un imperceptible trait du sillon que chacun de nous trace au sein de l'infini."

Argonne Association Work Is of Prime Importance

One American organization, the Argonne Association, is arousing much interest at the moment. It was originally established by the Red Cross to provide home and family life for the French child who has no parents; to insure his health; to educate him and train him to earn his livelihood, and to develop his character that he may become an upright and useful citizen. The aim of the association is to do these things so economically and well that others will follow its example.

There are a million children here who have been deprived by the war of their source of protection and support because their fathers laid down their lives for France. On the fate of these orphans depends, to a great extent, the future of France, with all that France means to civilization. Children of all ages are cared for, from early infancy to adolescence.

The "Cercle des Enfants" is situated about fifteen miles from Paris and cares for children under 4 years of age. These infants are placed in carefully selected families; a trained nurse resides in the town and supervises their homes, their feeding and their health. The "Colonie Familiale" provides home care in the country for children from 4 to 14 years of age. It is located at Dun-sur-Auron, south of Bourges. Here in the clean homes of this quaint old town these orphans live like other children; they share the family life, they go to school dressed like their school fellows. There is nothing to distinguish them from children who have fathers and mothers to care for them.

Vocational Training, Too. After Studies Are Ended

The "Cour d'Apprentissage" gives vocational training to the Argonne boys and girls who have finished their studies; the boys are trained to be farmers and the girls to be housewives, gardeners, dressmakers, milliners, &c.

For the training of the boys the association is making use of the Farm Schools of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Finally, the Argonne Association says that its purpose is not only to help war orphans in France, but also to make its work contribute toward the better care of children throughout the world.

And what of disarmament? As with the Belgians, so is it with the French; they cannot shake off their fear of another invasion. They have no confidence in Germany's word or intentions. They claim that they are not militaristic, but must protect themselves. One thing is certain: There will be no reduction of armaments here unless some guarantee is given the French that other countries will come to her aid in case of need.